

Lawson McGhee Library
217 Market Street
Knoxville
Knox County
Tennessee

HABS No. TN-213

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47-KNOX
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C.

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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LAWSON MCGHEE LIBRARY

HABS No. TN-213

Location: 217 Market Street, Knoxville, Knox County, Tennessee

Present Owner: City of Knoxville

Present Occupant: Vacant

Significance: The Lawson McGhee Library, built in 1915-1916, is a Neo-classic and Art Moderne structure. Notable are its extensive use of terra cotta on the exterior and Tennessee marble on the interior, its classic simplicity of form and its elegant detail.

The library's historical legacy is that it was one of the few libraries in the South to be completely locally funded.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1915-1916.
2. Architects: Grant C. Miller, Fullenwider, and Dowling, Chicago, architects.

A. B. Baumann, Knoxville, associate architect

3. Original and subsequent owners:

a. Legal description: The lot is at the northwest corner of the intersection of Market Street and Commerce Avenue in the city of Knoxville.

- b. Chain of title:

Bk. C, Vol. 4, p. 391, 4/2/1885

Deed of Trust, C. M. McGhee to Adrian Terry, President.

Set up present library

Bk. 268, p. 81, 3/28/1913

J. W. Borches to Library Trustees. Library swaps property at the southwest corner of Prince (Market) and Commerce Streets valued at \$9,000 to Borches property at the northwest corner of Prince and Commerce Streets for an additional \$16,000, "for the

purpose of erecting there on a handsome modern well-equipped library building for the benefit of the people of Knoxville, and make the library absolutely free to the white people of the city of Knoxville."

1/23/1915, Library Board Minutes. Sold original Gay Street property to J. N. Bricketto and T. Rebori for \$62,950.

Bk. 295, p. 403, 4/22/1914

Lawson McGhee Library to the city of Knoxville for the Market Street lot and building. Recorded 3/16/1917.

4. Building or contractor, suppliers: The following is a list of those involved in the construction of the library:

Thomas and Turner	General contract work
Engert and Vance	Plumbing and heating
Atlanta Terra Cotta Company	Terra cotta applications
Ross and Republic Company	Exterior marble
Fenton Construction Company	Interior marble

5. Original plans and construction: The following paraphrased newspaper accounts record the original plans and construction of the library:

Knoxville Journal and Tribune, May 13, 1915.

The total cost of the building is estimated at \$59,540.37. The original plan called for more marble but more terra cotta is used instead. Nevertheless there is possibly as much as \$10,000 worth of marble in the structure. Its major approach is from the south and east. Commerce Avenue grade is reduced seven feet. Work gets underway June 1.

Knoxville Sentinel, January 15, 1915.

The building is classic in design and is imposing from all view points. It is set back from Market Street by thirty feet. It fronts on Market 105 feet. The lot measures 134 x 140 feet. It has two stories with no basement and has a reception hall that measures 20 x 21-1/2 feet.

The center entry is twenty feet wide with marble steps flanked by buttresses topped by cluster lights done in bronze. Atop the marble pedestal is the inscription "Free to the Public." Wings to each side have numerous windows and sills and copings of marble. The roof is red Spanish tile.

On the interior capacious openings, flanked by towering columns will lead to the reference room on the north side of the front, and to the general reading room on the south side. Each measures 39 x 27 feet and is equipped with eight large tables to accommodate six readers each. On the Commerce Avenue side is the children's reading room which measures 23 x 40 feet and contains eight tables. The stacks are on the north rear of the reference room and contain space for 51,000 volumes. The building is built of steel and fireproof construction. Other rooms are the cataloguing room opposite the entry between the children's room and the stacks which measures 18 x 20 feet, the librarian's office which measures 14 1/2 x 20 feet, and lavatories. The interior is finished in a profusion of marble and special attention is given to light and ventilation. In fact 25% of the building's wall surfaces is glass windows--5% more than is required by law for schools.

There is no basement but on the ground floor there is a lecture and art room which measures 35 x 70 feet and can seat 250 to 300 people. Modern seating arrangements and light for the art displays compliment art exhibits, lectures, and public gatherings.

Knoxville Sentinel, September 19, 1916

The building is heated with steam. The ventilating fan is in the basement. The interior walls are gray and brown. The building will be ready for occupancy on November 15.

Knoxville Sentinel, January 10, 1917

The foundations and interior decor is of Tennessee marble quarried near Knoxville. The woodwork and furniture are of fumed oak and the walls and ceilings are done in harmonizing shades of green and brown. All parts of the building are equipped with a self-regulating heating and ventilating system.

6. Alterations and additions:

Oct. 1952-1953 - \$177,000 addition constructed. A children's room is included in this addition.

- B. Historical Context: In 1971 the library was closed due to the opening of the new library on Church Street. It has continued to be vacant ever since.

For more information, see Sources of Information.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

General description: The building is a rectangle and is two stories in height. The front facade is seven bays wide and two bays deep. The brick walls, which are technically for structural purposes, are faced with terra cotta. The foundations are reinforced concrete faced with marble. The gable roof, with its ridge parallel to the front facade, is of steel frame. Red clay tiles cover it. A porch is included in this building. Bronze lampstands, installed at construction time, are still standing.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early Views: Early photographs showing exterior and interior views of the library, HABS field records filed under Lawson McGhee Library, available for immediate use at the Library of Congress.

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Minutes of the Board of Trustees of Lawson McGhee Library.
Lawson McGhee Library, Church Street, Knoxville, Tennessee.

Knox County Deed Books, County Courthouse, Knoxville,
Tennessee. Property records.

Vertical file, McClung Collection. Lawson McGhee Library,
Knoxville, Tennessee.

2. Secondary and published sources:

"Remarks in Honor of Miss Mary Rothrock..." and "Fifty Years of
Lawson McGhee Library 1917-67". East Tennessee Historical
Society Magazine. #39. 1967. pp. 3-6, 7-12.

The French Broad - Holston County. A History of Knox County,
Tennessee. "The Library Movement after the Civil War",
pp. 240-250. Mary U. Rothrock, ed., East Tennessee Historical
Society, 1946.

Newspaper articles:

Knoxville Journal and Tribune, 5/13/15

Knoxville Sentinel, 1/15/15; 9/19/16; 1/10/17

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the Tennessee Historical Commission and the East Tennessee Historical Society. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, the project was completed during the Summer of 1974.

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